

## **ABSTRACT**

**DISSERTATION/THESIS/RESEARCH PAPER/CREATIVE PROJECT:** Falling Stars: An Examination of Star Athlete Sexual Assault Cases and the Public Relations Crisis Response Strategies Utilized by Their Teams

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With the longstanding popularity of American team sports having now lead us to a point where athletes are multi-million dollar investments capable of impacting culture beyond the playing field, the teams and leagues that provide a platform for these athletes to perform are more concerned with image and brand management now more than ever. Consequently, star athletes have become an increasingly vital part of building and sustaining league and team brands. The public relations methods utilized by these groups, especially the teams, when a star athlete has committed a PR blunder have varied over time. This content analysis uncovers whether the public relations tactics used by teams when a star athlete is accused of sexual assault has any impact on fan support. The study also seeks to find the public relations best practices that teams use in this situation, and whether or not there is any relationship in methods used by leagues and their corresponding teams and front offices. Newspaper articles pertaining to the sexual assault accusations of Kobe Bryant, Ben Roethlisberger and Johan Santana were used in this analysis, with two major news publications from each athlete's home city providing the content.